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THE URBAN NEGRO AND ADOPTION OF CHILDREN.

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THIS STUDY OF THE ATTITUDES OF NEGROES TOWARD THE ADOPTION OF NEGRO CHILDREN IS BASED ON INTERVIEWS WITH POTENTIAL ADOPTIVE COUPLES IN BALTIMORE AND WASHINGTON, D.C. THE RESEARCH SOUGHT TO ASCERTAIN THE REASONS FOR THE VERY LOW ADOPTION RATE OF NEGRO CHILDREN IN THE TWO CITIES. THE SAMPLE CONSISTED OF 484 ECONOMICALLY STABLE PEOPLE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 25 TO 50, WHO HAD INTACT MARRIAGES AND EITHER NO CHILDREN OR ONLY ONE. DATA WERE OBTAINED ON SOCIOECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS, ON THE EXTENT OF KNOWLEDGEABILITY ABOUT ADOPTION, AND ON ATTITUDES TOWARD SOCIAL AGENCIES. MOST RESPONDENTS INDICATED THAT THEY WERE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HISTORY OF THE NATURAL PARENTS AND ABOUT THE HEALTH OF THE ADOPTIVE CHILD THAN ABOUT ANY OTHER FACTORS. WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE PREFERRED SOURCES FOR ADOPTION, THE RESPONDENTS MENTIONED AGENCIES AND RELATIVES, MOST FREQUENTLY. CERTAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO CITIES SEEMED TO SHOW UP MORE CLEARLY THAN SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS DIFFERENCES. IT IS HYPOTHESIZED THAT THE BASIC LACK OF MOTIVATION TO ADOPT MAY BE RELATED TO THE VALUES OF THE SUCCESSFUL URBAN NEGRO. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN "CHILD WELFARE," VOLUME 41, NUMBER 9, NOVEMBER 1962. (NH)

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The Urban Negro and Adoption of Children

Negro couples in Baltimore and Washington were interviewed on their attitudes toward adoption of children. The respondents think of agencies as the prime source of adoptive children and expressed no great fear of involvement with them. The reasons for the lack of motivation to adopt seem to be in the values of the successful urban Negro.

LEILA CALHOUN DEASY AND
OLIVE WESTBROOKE QUINN

It seems that everywhere we look these days we find a social problem. One of the gravest ones, and as yet unsolved, is posed by the numbers of Negro children who are born out of wedlock, whose natural parents either cannot or do not wish to care for them, and for whom neither adequate foster homes nor adoptive parents have been found. For instance, in Baltimore and Washington, D.C., in 1959, according to official statistics, 7129 Negro children were born to parents who were not married to each other—yet only 226 Negro children were legally adopted in these two cities in 1959. Please do not draw the inference that we think adoptive placement is the only answer to the situation created by out-of-wedlock births. Yet, the majority of adoptive children are so conceived. And in adoptive homes these children may find a degree of economic, social, and psychological security that otherwise might not be theirs.

Social agencies on both the local and national levels have been trying for years to increase the numbers of Negro children who are legally adopted. But the success of such programs seems to have fallen far short of expectations and aspirations. One might go so far as to say that there seems to be a remarkable, indeed a crashing, lack of interest among Negroes in the adoption of children. Why is this so?

Social agencies have been very much interested in finding answers to this question. The Family and Children's Society of Baltimore approached Dr. Olive Westbrooke Quinn, Director of the Center for Sociological Studies of Goucher College, to propose that she investigate this topic. She worked closely with the Advisory Committee on Negro Adoptions of the Family and Children's Society of Baltimore in her research.

In Washington, I had learned that many Negro mothers who expressed interest in placing their children for adoption could not do so because agencies were not able to take the children. For with few foster homes and adoptive applicants available, what were the agencies to do with these children?

This seemed to us to be a "natural" for a collaborative project in which the same overall questions would be asked, the same data-gathering instrument would be used, the same analysis plan would be followed, but the respondents would be drawn from two presumably different kinds of cities. It was the kind of question that social scientists are eminently well equipped, both

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methodologically and theoretically, to study. Use of survey techniques would enable us to secure specific information on this subject from large numbers of people, and with what is known, sociologically, about urban Negroes we expected to be able to make some theoretical sense of our findings.

Dr. Quinn's students at Goucher College and my students at the School of Social Service at Catholic University did much of the interviewing, although volunteers and paid interviewers also worked with us. Since we were sure that race might be a factor in influencing both respondents' willingness to be interviewed and their responses in the interviews, 66 percent of the interviews were conducted by Negroes.

Grants from the Washington *Evening Star* and the National Institute of Mental Health [1] helped us to meet necessary expenses. In planning the study, we talked to social scientists at Howard University and to social workers in adoption practice. The sponsorship of the Washington Urban League and consultation with members of its staff, most notably Walter Lewis and Anita Bellamy, were crucial. Their interest in the project will not soon be forgotten; in fact it could not have been done without their help.

Focus of the Research

What did we want to find out? We reasoned that the question we had set out to answer—why don't Negroes adopt children?—was probably extremely complex—that contributing to the answer would be many factors: perhaps *lack of knowledge of adoption* or *fear of agencies* or *concern about children who are available for adoption*—their social origins or their physical or psychological well-being. Or perhaps values other than those pre-eminent in the nurturing of children might be found to take precedence: Would we find inferences that the need for a measure of economic and psychological security was so great that the rewards of having a family were disregarded by those interviewed? It was to such questions as this that we decided to try to find answers. In doing so, we asked each person a standard series of sixty-four questions, all of which, with the exception of background items, had to do with some aspect of adoption.

The Population Surveyed

Obviously, an understanding of why relatively few Negroes adopt children was not to be found by operating within the framework of agencies. We were not interested in the opinions of "captive" populations—i.e., those known to be interested in adoptions. A different approach was indicated. We wanted to go to the source, to talk to representatives of the great anonymous public—those from whose numbers potential adoptive parents might well be drawn. Thus, we decided to send people out into residential areas of the two cities to talk to people in their homes.

While no elaborate sampling procedure was followed, we did want to insure that those interviewed would meet at least minimum agency expectations for adoptive parents. Since we hoped that persons actually involved in placing children would be interested in our findings, it seemed important to know the thoughts of people whom agencies might consider as adoptive parents. Thus, we decided to interview:

1. Persons who were partners in intact marriages—not single, divorced, or widowed.
2. Persons who were neither too old nor too young to be likely to be considered as potential adoptive parents—those between twenty-five and fifty years of age.
3. Persons who either had no children or who had only one child over the age of five.

We drew our respondents from neighborhoods in which there was a predominance of economically stable people. We tried also to obtain an overrepresentation of persons with higher than average levels of education and better than average jobs.

While these criteria were applied more rigorously in Washington than in Baltimore, the cases drawn from the two cities were quite similar in their characteristics. Three hundred twenty-three people were seen in Washington and 161 in Baltimore. Thus, the findings to be reported here are based on interviews conducted with 484 people. I do not know the refusal rate in Baltimore, but

[1] National Institute of Mental Health Grants No. M-4345A and M-4346A were awarded to the investigators.

in Washington, less than one in twenty of the persons approached *who met our criteria* refused to be interviewed.

Characteristics of Families Interviewed

As you would expect a couple of sociologists to do, we secured a great deal of information on the characteristics of the people interviewed. We can report only briefly on some of these findings.

Socioeconomic Status

We classified our 484 respondents into socioeconomic status groups, using the Hollingshead two-factor index of socioeconomic status.[2] When we combined those respondents whose scores placed them in Hollingshead's status levels I and II into a single group, we found that seventy-five Washingtonians and sixty-one Baltimoreans, or 28 percent of the total, were placed in our highest SES level. In our Group II, comprising those who fell into Classes III and IV on Hollingshead's scale, were 208 Washingtonians and seventy Baltimoreans. And in our Group III, which is identical to Hollingshead's Class V, were forty Washingtonians and thirty Baltimoreans, or 14 percent of the total. Thus, in almost three out of every ten couples the husband was in a professional, subprofessional, or managerial job, and had had college training or training beyond the bachelor's degree. Another six out of ten were in white collar, skilled, or semi-skilled occupations, with high school training and beyond. Only 14 percent of the husbands were in unskilled occupations and had not finished high school.

Sex and Age

Although we tried to interview as many men as possible, two out of three persons seen were women. Respondents were relatively evenly distributed with respect to age; slightly more than half of them were under forty. We found that, among those interviewed, persons in the highest SES group tended to be younger than did those lower down the SES scale.

Children

Slightly more than half of these marriages were childless. What is even more surprising, however, is the fact that there were more childless marriages in the two lower SES groups than in the highest one.

Length of Residence

The persons interviewed were longtime residents of the cities where they now live, more than three fourths of them having lived in their present city of residence—Baltimore or Washington—for more than ten years. Eighty-one percent of them, however, had lived in their present neighborhood for less than ten years. In spite of this, more than six in ten owned their own homes. Homeownership was more common in Baltimore, where three out of four were homeowners, than in Washington, where one out of two was a homeowner.

Employment Status of Wife

In 78 percent of the cases, the wife was employed outside the home. Since home ownership in large cities is not easy to achieve, especially for Negroes, perhaps this is one reason why so many of our respondents were able to own their own homes.

Stability of Employment

Just as homeownership is taken by department stores and banks as some kind of index of willingness to assume responsibility, so, too, is employment stability. Fifty-nine percent of the husbands in the 484 cases studied had been in their present jobs for more than ten years.

Marital Stability

In a population where there are many homeowners and where a large percentage have a history of job stability, one would expect marital stability as well. We found that in 57 percent of these cases the partners had been married to each other for more

[2] This index assigns weighted scores to the factors of occupation and education. For a description of the index, see August B. Hollingshead and Frederick B. Redlich, *Social Class and Mental Illness* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1958), pp. 387–397.

than ten years. In 69 percent of the cases, this was the first marriage for both spouses.

Social Mobility

With increasing educational and job opportunities for Negroes, one would expect in a study such as this to find many people who had risen on the socioeconomic ladder. This we did find. Fifty-one percent of our respondents occupied higher positions, occupationally and educationally, than had their fathers; and three out of four of the 136 people in our Socio-Economic Status Group I had been socially mobile upward.

Religion

Our respondents were predominantly Protestant; only 10 percent were Roman Catholic. Practically all of them said they were affiliated with a church, and only six of the 484 replied "none" when asked about religious affiliation.

A Stable Group

Who are these people we have been describing to you? We might say, in summary, that our respondents are a stable group: stable in terms of job, stable in terms of marriage. Most of them belong and go to church; three out of five own their own homes. They are persons who had risen—as Americans are supposed to do. They have gone to school, and they have moved up the occupational ladder from the base provided by their fathers. They have departed somewhat from the stereotype of the dominant American middle class in only two ways: They had not achieved the supposedly ideal family size of two or more children, and the wife was employed outside the home.

Understanding of Adoption

You will recall that we were interested in the extent to which they are familiar with the practice of *adoption of children.* We asked them to define the word adoption. Less than 6 percent gave a definition that did not include a reference to children, although only 19 percent made any reference to the legal aspects of adoption. The majority thought that adoption meant the acceptance of another's child as if it were one's own. When asked why children became available for adoption, they replied that it is because the children were born out of wedlock (62 percent) or were orphaned (49 percent), and that natural parents placed children for adoption because they could not take care of them (50 percent) or did not want them (40 percent).

Not only did our respondents have familiarity with adoption in the abstract, but 88 percent said that they knew someone who had adopted a child. The great majority said they felt the adoptive parents had been wise to adopt, although one in nine questioned the wisdom of this act or offered no opinion as to its wisdom. Only one in twenty reported that they thought the adoptive parents were unhappy that they had adopted a child. Thus, their abstract understanding of adoption was reinforced by the concrete experiences of friends. Ten of our respondents were themselves adoptive parents.

We asked whether they would encourage friends who wanted to adopt a child to do so. Seven in ten said that they would. This answer may reflect acceptance of adoption —or a tendency to encourage a friend in any activity he contemplates. Yet, almost one in ten persons gave a qualified response to this question and stated that it would depend on whether they thought the friend would make a good parent. Of those who would encourage a friend to adopt, 90 percent stated that they would encourage the friend to go to a social agency for a child.

Attitude Toward Social Agencies

Thus, there is abundant evidence that our respondents were aware of adoption as a means of acquiring children. Let us now move to the question of their attitudes toward social agencies: To what extent were they knowledgeable about, and accepting of, social agencies?

When asked where a couple could go to find a child to adopt, 48 percent of our respondents mentioned a social agency as the first choice. Next most often mentioned were church or minister, doctor or hospital. With regard to agency requirements of parents, the one most often mentioned (86 percent) was the adoptive couple's personal charac-

teristics; e.g., 34 percent indicated that a happy marriage was required. More than three out of four stated that agencies require adoptive parents to be financially responsible, and less than one in ten were of the opinion that agencies do not allow the adoptive mother to work. Four in ten of our respondents reported that agencies attempt to insure that children placed in adoption will match the adoptive parents. Many were quite specific about the importance of skin color or texture of hair. In reporting on the experience of friends who had adopted through social agencies, only 5 percent stated that their friends were dissatisfied with the way the adoption had been handled. The overwhelming majority of our respondents who knew anything about adoption agencies (357, or 89 percent, of the 484) thought they were doing a good job.

We do not mean to imply that our respondents had no reservations about agencies. When we asked the direct question, "Why are there not enough Negro adoptive homes?" one in five made reference to agency operations. They stated that agency requirements are too stringent or that the agency is too inquisitive, that it does too much snooping, or that there is too much red tape involved. Some characterized the waiting period between application and placement of a child as too long. Thus, agencies do not come out unscathed; our respondents placed a part of the blame on them.

Respondents' Requirements

We have noted our respondents' knowledge of adoption and their perceptions of social agencies. What did they have to say about the children who are available and how much the agency should tell the adoptive parent? The principal theme running through the responses was an expressed need to *know* about the adoptive child—his physical and mental condition, his natural parents, his life experiences prior to adoption. (Fifty percent wanted to know about all four.) They were not concerned with *whether the child had been conceived out of wedlock* or *what the social position of his parents had been* or *how old his mother was at the time of his birth.* They *were concerned* about the physical and mental history of the child's parents.

When asked to choose which of four factors was most important in an adoptive child (similar background, similar religion, similar intelligence, and health), our respondents' overriding concern was the health (47 percent) of the adoptive child. And when we asked them to describe a child they would want if they were adopting, again the factor of health arose. Almost half (47 percent) of the respondents mentioned health, specifying either that the child have no physical disabilities or that he be normal. One wonders if one would find such great emphasis on "normality" among whites. We do not know. There are no comparable studies of attitudes of whites or, if there are, we do not know about them.[3] The ideal adoptive child, if we may generalize from our data, is an infant boy who is intelligent, who has no health problems, and who resembles, physically, one or both adoptive parents.

Some respondents did refer to the selectivity of Negroes in terms of color, intelligence, and appearance of the child. They stated that adoptive parents might fear that their child would not be above par, that he might embarrass them, or that he might not keep up the family reputation. We counted 117 instances of reasons such as these as explanations for the shortage of Negro adoptive homes.

Respondents' Choice of Method

In exploring the area of sources of children, we listed a number of possible alternatives and asked those interviewed to express a preference. The two sources most often mentioned were: adoption agency (45 percent) and relatives (41 percent). The reasons given for these choices were illuminating.

Those citing the agency as the preferred choice talked in terms of the legality and finality of the process; they referred to the anonymity that was guaranteed and made

[3] Editor's Note—Dr. Deasy is currently conducting a replication of the study reported here, with a white population, using grant funds awarded by the Children's Bureau, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. A report of this research will be published in CHILD WELFARE.

reference to the expertness of the agency in placing children. Those citing relatives as the preferred choice emphasized the responsibility one might feel toward one's kin and said that the adoptive parent would feel closer to the child (perhaps an obscure illusion to the folksaying that blood is thicker than water). They also stated that less risk would be involved, for one would know something about the child.

It might be assumed from this finding that there is some justification for the statement sometimes expressed that there is no reason for concern about dependent Negro children, for they will be cared for, through the device of informal arrangements, by persons other than their parents if the need arises. We can neither substantiate nor disprove such a statement on the basis of our findings. We can state categorically, however, that there is little evidence of the assumption of responsibility for the children of others among the people we saw. Eighty-two percent said that they *had not in any way* assumed responsibility for the children of others. Only 8 percent, including the ten couples who had adopted children, had assumed *major* responsibility for other people's children. Such a pattern of assuming responsibility may be prevalent among rural Negroes or among working-class urban Negroes, but certainly it was not found among the persons to whom we talked, even among those who are members of SES Group III—those who had not finished high school and were in unskilled jobs. It may be, of course, that the relatives and friends of our respondents are perfectly capable of looking after their own children and do not need to call on someone else.

Acceptance According to Sex

We wondered whether our respondents would see acceptance of adoption as sex-linked, whether they would think there would be a difference between men and women on this score. We asked them which member of a marital pair would be more likely to suggest adoption first. The majority (65 percent) told us that the woman would be more likely to suggest adoption first. Only one in twenty expressed the belief that the man would be more likely to do so. Many of our respondents expressed the opinion that children are somehow more important to women than to men and that whatever problems are involved in adopting a child would, for women, be overbalanced by the satisfactions to be derived from the maternal role. The statement was often made that if a man does not father his own children, he is not likely to be particularly interested in adopting a child, whereas a woman somehow would know that she could derive satisfaction from mothering a child she had not borne.

Over Half of Respondents Childless

How accepting of the idea of *adopting children themselves* were our respondents? Of the 52 percent who were partners in childless marriages, more than two-fifths (43 percent) stated that the possibility of adopting a child *had never been considered.* (We do not know how many of these childless marriages were childless by choice, in the sense of the marital partners' having planned *not* to have children by the usual biological process, but since 90 percent of them were Protestant, there presumably would be no moral problem incurred for them by artificial limitation of family size.) Of the remainder, only one in ten was now thinking about adoption as a means of having a family. Some told us that they had talked about adoption, but had never gotten beyond the discussion stage. In a number of cases (six), the husband had proposed adoption, but the wife had been reluctant. In other cases (29), the wife had proposed adoption, but the husband had been reluctant.

When those with children were asked whether they would have considered adopting a child if they had had none, only one in four said that they would not. This is, of course, a hypothetical situation that we had posed, and the responses elicited may not be a true indicator of what those interviewed in fact would have done if they had not had children. But certainly, parents who were seen seemed quite accepting of the idea of adoption.

Some couples, including one who had been married more than twenty years, were still planning to have their own children.

Differences in Subsamples

Having looked at the characteristics of the total group, let us now see whether factors such as socioeconomic status and city of residence seem related to responses.

I am sure that you are familiar with the importance attached by social scientists to socioeconomic status as a key to understanding why people behave as they do. We had assumed that it would be important in this study—that *how adoption is perceived* would be related to the *socioeconomic status of the perceiver*. The differences among the three groups into which we divided our respondents do not seem to be as remarkable as we had expected they would be, although there are, of course, some differences.

For instance, of the ten families in the study who had adopted children legally, nine were in Groups I and II and only one in Group III. While the majority of those in Group I said they would choose a child through an agency, those in Group III chose "agency child" and "relative's child" in equal numbers.

A smaller percentage of members of the highest SES group reported having assumed responsibility for other people's children than did members of the other two groups. They were also less likely than members of Group III to say they would encourage friends to adopt. Members of Groups I and III, especially in Washington, said in proportionately greater numbers than did members of Group II that they would have to be sure friends who wanted to adopt would be good parents before encouraging them to do so. Group III members seemed to feel freer to offer advice to friends on the matter of adoption than did members of Groups I and II.

What comes through in these data more strongly than differences by socioeconomic status are differences between the two cities. In general, the findings that characterize the total sample are present to a more pronounced degree in the Washington subsample than in the Baltimore subsample. But there are differences between the two populations, and they are of two sorts.

The first we might characterize as differences of degree. For instance, with respect to information about and attitudes toward agencies, one of our major concerns, the Washington respondents seemed to be both better informed with respect to agency practice—at least more opinionated—and more critical. They did report, however, that if they decided to adopt, they would choose an agency as a source (50 percent) rather than a relative (41 percent). These figures were almost reversed in Baltimore, where 50 percent said they would prefer a relative's child; 43 percent, a child placed by a social agency. Baltimore respondents choosing a relative's or friend's child would do so because they felt a responsibility toward the child; Washington respondents choosing an agency said they would do so to assure anonymity, legality, and the protection afforded by expert guidance from agencies. We found also that while 90 percent of Baltimore respondents who knew of an adoption knew whether there was agency involvement, only 75 percent of the Washingtonians who knew of an adoption were able to say whether there was agency involvement. These differences emphasize the sociologists' *oft-stated* but *almost-as-often-disregarded* admonition not to generalize findings based on one population to another presumably similar one.

With our attention drawn so forceably to these intercity differences, the search for explanations was on. We looked at some of the background factors, and we found that in some respects the two subsamples *were* different, that there were differences in kind. For instance, there was more upward social mobility among Washingtonians (51 percent) than among Baltimoreans (44 percent). Thirty-seven percent of those who lived in Baltimore had been born in that city, while only 21 percent of those who were living in Washington had been born there. In Washington, 56 percent of our respondents were under forty; in Baltimore, 44 percent. While 55 percent of the persons seen in Washington were childless, only 31 percent of the Baltimoreans had no children. As previously reported, 75 percent of the Baltimoreans owned their homes, against 50 percent of the Washingtonians.

Thus, the Washington population is a less stable one, not so likely to be homeowners or parents. They are more likely to have come from elsewhere and to have risen on the socioeconomic ladder. Herein probably

lies the explanation for the paradox of their greater knowledge and more ready criticism of agencies, coupled with their expressed preference for an agency child. The person who has more recently arrived on the urban scene, who at once has sought the opportunities of a new city and has risen on the social ladder, may well have severed, or at least attenuated, his ties with home. Thus, readiness to accept a relative's child would be expected to be less great among people on the upward climb.

Maas and Engler, in their study *Children in Need of Parents,* propose that adoption through an agency will be an infrequent practice in communities where "personalization of relationships obtains."[4] Although there is the same ratio of legal adoptions to out-of-wedlock births among Negroes in Washington and in Baltimore (1:33), there is a definite inference in the data that Baltimore's Negro population—at least as represented by those included in this study—is more homogeneous, more stable, and, one might even say, more easygoing than is true of Washington's Negroes. One senses also that the way of life in the two cities intimately affects, or at least is related to, attitudes toward adoption—a practice that seems much more fitted to an impersonal, segmented, contractual situation, which is precisely how Washington may be experienced by many of its Negro residents.

Conclusions

This brings us at last to the conclusions we would present for your consideration. We embarked on this study expecting that no simple solution would be found to why Negroes do not adopt. We know now that it is not, in Washington and Baltimore at least, for lack of information about adoption—or for lack of opinions, sometimes strongly held, about what agency practice should be or the characteristics of children desired.

Our respondents think of agencies as a prime source of adoptive children and express no great fear of involvement with them. Yet there seems to be a basic lack of motivation to adopt.

One is forced to conclude that the reasons for this lack of motivation must lie in the values to which successful urban Negroes subscribe. Surely many of the childless respondents we saw were childless by choice. If one chooses not to have a child by the biological process, why adopt one through an agency? To look at adoption of children without looking at the whole matter of children, and their places in one's larger scheme of things, probably is an artificial approach. Parenthood involves risk; it involves taking a chance with life. As a well-known resident of Washington has said: "Children are the hostages of fortune." Perhaps to a degree parents are the hostages of their parenthood.

The people to whom we talked were not economically insecure. But one must attend to other types of insecurity. We know too well that to attain that state of mind that makes it possible to contemplate the future with any measure of equanimity is difficult for everyone these days—and perhaps more so for Negroes. One thinks of the Negro adolescent boy described in Frazier's *Negro Youth at the Crossways*[5] who came from a large family and who vowed not to have children because in his family there had never been enough to go around. Perhaps if he were in a position to choose, he would decide not to be "left out" before he would decide to have a child. As the future becomes more trustworthy for them, let us hope that more Negroes can trust and can look to a future that includes children—either born to them or taken as their own.

[4] Henry S. Maas and Richard E. Engler, Jr., *Children in Need of Parents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 291.

[5] E. Franklin Frazier, *Negro Youth at the Crossways* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1941).

Discussion

STERLING TUCKER

We are most grateful to Drs. Deasy and Quinn for their extensive sampling of Negro families—families that we might expect to be "most likely to adopt." Yet the fact remains that few of them are doing so. The sample shows that the majority of them not only are aware of the most satisfactory way of adopting—i.e., through a recognized social agency—but would seek the assistance of such an agency if they chose to take the step. Thus, ignorance is not the greatest factor behind why they do not adopt.

We have no way of knowing from the study whether the families' failure to have natural children was of their own volition. If it was not, then their answers can be considered less relevant to their own situations. But, willingly or not, there are several very likely reasons why these people continue to remain childless. If we hope to find a way to place more homeless children, we must not shrink from facing any fact that could prove to be a deeply motivating factor.

Deterrents to Negro Adoptions

One of these factors is the basic difference between the outlook of a white parent and a Negro parent. The white parent, when deciding to bring a child into the world, looks at the international situation, and his fears turn on a global basis. The Negro parent, on the other hand, is concerned more with the problems of the immediate community. He is concerned about the schools that will be available, about job opportunities, and about housing.

The Negro parent feels that he is having a difficult time making his own way in the world and does not want to have the added burden of carrying his child, if the child is unable to do for himself. He questions whether he will be able to create for his child the integrated world that he desires for himself.

All of us have feelings of insecurity, but the Negro, in addition to these basic insecurities, has the weight of being a Negro. Regardless of any achievements, accomplishments, or activities, there is the fact of color itself. He must carry the load for all Negroes. He is denied ownership of property and access to facilities because of his color, irrespective of his ability to pay, and this insecurity is a heavy one. When given the *choice* of whether or not to raise a child, these are fears that must be taken into consideration and allayed.

Although respondents in the Washington sample were shown to be a relatively stable group from an economic standpoint, we do not know how many of them are already living up to the fullest extent of, or beyond, an income that is fairly constant, not subject to significant periodic raises. The thought of changing from a stable but nonadvancing job to an unknown, possibly less secure one is a thought entertained uneasily by anyone, but especially by a minority employee, for whom the job market is far more tenuous. The spectre of "last hired, first fired" hangs still more heavily over a recent arrival in the city, especially one raised in the southern pattern, as were up to two-thirds of the respondents.

Let us look now at housing, the commodity next to employment that offers the least variety and availability to Negroes. The prospects of a child's joining the family, at least to such middle-class persons as were sampled, would certainly mean a requirement for a second bedroom. If the family lives in an apartment with just one bedroom, this means a move. While such a prospect would not inhibit a family whose mobility was unrestricted, this simply is not the case with Negroes in Washington and most other

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cities. Fifty percent own their own homes—still less incentive to change. Children present a problem in selecting a desirable location, particularly in an urban area, and in Washington there is little chance of moving out to the predominantly racially restricted suburbs. While housing would probably not stand in the way of a family truly eager to adopt, it might very well provide a major stumbling block to the couple less certain in their desires.

The working mother, an important source of income to the household, presents another problem. Without children, the wife has usually been employed for some years, probably for all of her adult life. She faces the loss of this income entirely, or at least temporarily while she makes arrangements for the care of the child. Day care facilities available to the mother who cannot make her own private arrangement are woefully inadequate, and there may be none anywhere near her residence. Even those that exist require either a fee or a share of the mother's time. If the mother is nearing forty years of age, the large majority of her friends have already had their children, and these are likely to be much older than an adoptive newcomer would be. Her social activities are set on an adult scale, and she may be reluctant to break this pattern.

Working with the Negro Client

When the Negro couple visits the social agency and explains their desire to adopt, there are naturally many questions on their minds. Most of these they share with all prospective adoptive couples, and the agencies are familiar with them. But where race is a factor, social usage has tended to inhibit free discussion, and important areas of reticence may prevent the full exploration of hopes and fears on both sides.

Most couples naturally want to be certain the child they adopt is in perfect health, as is seen in the sample's responses, but "health" covers a wide range. It can include health of both of the child's natural parents —thus the concern with illegitimacy and the possibility that nothing may be known about the father. The Negro couple may not be sure that a white caseworker will fully respect their concern over skin tone, and this important factor may remain in the reticent zone. Delays caused by the necessary paperwork discourage many, particularly when they know that the supply of children is so great. Agency fees, while generally based on "ability to pay," nonetheless place the couple under a sense of obligation to pay, especially since much of their financial background is made known to the agency. One couple, having heard of these various drawbacks from another, may never even take the trouble to apply. Hours when an agency may be visited are also limited to the working day, and many couples cannot get off. More subtle is the fact that most middle-class couples look upon seeking agency help as being in a category with other types of social aid that their independent status no longer requires.

In discussing adoption with Negro couples, the caseworker is dealing with fears, with the unknown; but as is so often seen, problems are not nearly so great as the fears themselves. Thus, the worker must gain the confidence of the client and identify with these fears, in order to be able to communicate with the client.

In the one-to-one relationship, the worker must also be able to talk convincingly to the client, in a responsible and knowledgeable way, of the problems faced by Negroes in the community. This should be in terms of specifics—these things are happening, these resources are planning to overcome these problems, this has been done, this will be done—a step-by-step carrythrough of the activities of others in the community with the same concerns. In dealing with the fears of the Negro client, the caseworker should have the knowledge and ability to communicate to the client that he is not alone, that the community is also concerned, and that the climate is changing to one in which it would be "safe" to raise a child.

The agency itself has a role in this process. It must actively participate in the changing of the community climate, and it must stimulate the other resources working in this area.

Adoption Gap One Among Many

Thus, we can see that the apparent unwillingness of many Negro couples to adopt

children is not an isolated phenomenon at all. Children come into our homes as part of the socioeconomic scheme to which we belong. They are expensive—the more so as our plans for their nurture and future educational needs grow more ambitious. The housing we furnish them, the economic well-being, the freedom of choice in the future, are all responsibilities of parenthood, planned or otherwise. For a family disadvantaged by the discrimination that hems in members of their group, these responsibilities take on aspects not common to society in general. A Negro who is first generation middle class has a lingering fear about security, which might be threatened by the additional economic burden of a child. He is striving and is fearful of being held back by a child, or he is fearful that the child will be left by society to fend for himself. He must be given a feeling for the future—satisfaction, not sacrifice, in raising a child, anticipation and hope rather than confusion.

Agencies must be aware of these added problems and must not hesitate to experiment with new approaches to the matter of placing children in minority homes. The Urban League can play two important roles here. First, it can act as a preliminary intermediary in channeling likely adoptive couples to the proper agency, allaying such initial fears as they may feel free to discuss with our staff. Second, the League offers its own experience, statistical information, and other research capabilities to the agencies in their search for experimental but sound new approaches. The Urban League program embraces activity in the fields of housing, employment, education, health, and other aspects of social welfare. For the Negro in Washington today, these are *all* social problems, and interrelated ones. Our experience with men and women, and their children, too, who must cope with more than their share of social burdens leads us to conclude that the adoption gap will be bridged only when the other gaps standing in the way of total family security have been bridged.

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HUNTER *(continued from p. 393)*

no center, while the real isolates and lonesome ones wither away in their rooms.

By setting up clear standards of accomplishment, agencies will be serving a better purpose in the long run than by obfuscation. It is a great temptation to make reports as glowing as possible when you have to justify your existence. But if these reports keep on being glowing and yet the problems generally persist and are visible all around, the public is entitled at least to bewilderment. The public is entitled to know what cannot be accomplished by present methods and institutions as well as what can.

These seem to me to be some of the reasons why we cannot confidently feel that social work is engaged effectively enough with the most pressing social problems of the day.

(Reprints of this article are available for 10 cents each.)

Reprints of Elizabeth Herzog's article, "Unmarried Mothers: Some Questions To Be Answered and Some Answers To Be Questioned" (October 1962 issue), are available for 20 cents each.